DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Commodity Credit Corporation

ACTION: NOTICE
Conservation Innovation Grants Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Announcement for Program Funding

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.912

SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture, is announcing availability of Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applications are accepted from all 50 States, Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2011 will be approximately $25 million. Applications are requested from eligible governmental or non-governmental organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration.

Funds will be awarded through a two-phase nationwide competitive grants process which will include a pre-proposal for all applications, and a full proposal package only for competitively selected pre-proposal applications, pursuant to notification by NRCS. Both phases are described in this announcement, but **only pre-proposals are being solicited at this time**.

This notice identifies the objectives for CIG projects, the eligibility criteria for projects, and provides the instructions needed to apply to CIG. Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant. NRCS will request a full proposal package only from those applicants selected in the pre-proposal phase.

DATES: Applications for the pre-proposal phase must be received at the NRCS National Headquarters by 4 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST), on **December 28, 2010**.

Notification of selected pre-proposal applications will be announced by **January 17, 2011**. Selected applicants will then be required to submit a full proposal package to the NRCS National Headquarters by 4 p.m. EST, on **March 4, 2011**.

ADDRESSES: The address for hand-delivered, express mail or overnight courier service for applications is: Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, Room 6227 South Building; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, D.C. 20250. The contact phone number for hand-delivered pre-proposals and applications (needed to enter the USDA South Building) is: (202) 720-8071.

Applications sent via the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, P.O. Box 2890, Room 6227-S, Washington, D.C. 20013-2890.

For more information contact:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) was authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8] under Section 2509 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP and CIG to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of the CCC.

B. Overview

The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies, while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides, and references or to the private sector. CIG does not fund research projects. Projects intended to formulate hypothesis do not qualify. CIG is to apply proven technology which has been shown to work previously. It is a vehicle to stimulate the development and adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a likelihood of success, and to be candidates for eventual technology transfer or institutionalization. CIG promotes sharing of skills, knowledge, technologies, and facilities among communities, governments, and other institutions to ensure that scientific and technological developments are accessible to a wider range of users. CIG funds projects targeting innovative on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

A two-phase evaluation process will be utilized for applications submitted under this notice. The first phase requires the applicant to submit a pre-proposal. Applications will be evaluated by NRCS staff under the bulleted topics identified by the applicant (see section I.D). Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

NRCS will accept applications for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years, submitted to NRCS from eligible entities including federally recognized Indian tribes, State and local units of government, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. Applications are accepted from all 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

NRCS will request a full proposal package only from those applicants selected in the pre-proposal process. Complete applications received by applicable deadlines will be evaluated by a technical peer review panel based on the Criteria for Application Evaluation identified in the application instructions in section VI.B.

Applications with technically-based recommendations from the peer review groups will be forwarded to the Grants Review Board. The Grants Review Board will make recommendations for project approval to the NRCS Chief who will make the final selections.

C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must encompass the development, field testing, evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of:

- Conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems, including market-based systems; or
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches; and
- Environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

To be given priority consideration, the innovative project or activity should:

- Make use of a proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;
- Demonstrate and verify environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy use, and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of conservation technology in the field;
- Adapt conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption;
- Introduce conservation systems, approaches, and procedures from another geographic area or agricultural sector; and
- Adapt conservation technology, management, or incentive systems to improve performance; and
- Demonstrate transferability of knowledge.

D. National Component

For FY 2011, CIG will offer the following funding categories: National, Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and Mississippi River Basin. These funding categories may include applications that focus on market-based approaches to conservation, including the advancement of emerging markets for ecosystem services and the development of market-based tools. Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes or eligible entities servicing Beginning, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes are encouraged to submit application(s) in any of the categories. Pre-proposals must identify the most appropriate bulleted topic the innovation/technology is addressing.

1. National Category

Only pre-proposals that demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one bulleted topic listed below will be considered.

Ecosystems Markets

- Development of regional partnerships, market infrastructure (such as ecosystem market registries), and integrated tools that facilitate the development of ecosystem markets.
- Design and demonstration of active ecosystem markets that result in real water quality and biodiversity trades.

- Development of models and monitoring systems to analyze economic and environmental effects of ecosystem markets.
- Design and implementation of multi-credit ecosystem service trades or demonstration of stacking/bundling ecosystem services.
- Development and testing of verification and certification protocols for ensuring environmental benefits from ecosystem market transactions.
- Design and use of conservation easements that incorporate multiple ecosystem markets.
- Development and sophistication of the "Farm of the Future" concept which incorporates ecosystem benefits options into a landowner's portfolio as effective new revenue streams.
- Demonstrate that agroforestry systems that can provide new revenue through ecosystem benefits.

Adapting Management for Improved Conservation Effects

- Use the field-level Agriculture Policy Extender (APEX) model to generate site-based benefits of conservation, including quantifiable outcome-based metrics that fits within the NRCS field office planning structure.
- Development of innovative technologies to reduce transformation and transport of mercuric compounds (methyl mercury), nitrogen, and other potential contaminants from natural and constructed wetlands.
- Cloud based computational analysis and modeling to link resource concerns, conservation systems/practices, and quantifiable outcome-based metrics.
- Develop planning and decision aids to assess and maximize environmental outcomes of implementing conservation systems on working lands, including metrics that quantify units of environmental benefits provided.

Preservation and Enhancement of Wildlife Habitat

- Develop planning and decision aids to assess and maximize wildlife habitat value on land used to grow bio-fuel crops, including metrics that quantify units of potential habitat provided.
- Examine managed grazing as a habitat management tool, including metrics that quantify units of potential habitat provided.
- Establish criteria for Fish Passage Facilities for Pacific lamprey and other species of high conservation concern.
- Develop fish screen technology and criteria for native aquatic species of conservation concern.
- Evaluate (and quantify) the benefits of controlling invasive species in forest habitats.

Energy

- Innovative tools to estimate the energy and fossil fuel implications of cropland agronomic practices. Such tools need to be based on sound science and data, yet be useable by farmers and conservationists. Proposals may be based either on extending and validating the NRCS Cropland Energy Estimator prototype or developing a new tool.
- Life cycle analyses for current conservation practices to assess the energy and fossil fuel implications associated with the use of the practice including analyzing the fossil fuel embedded in materials and agrochemicals.

- Innovative implementation systems to achieve greater use of energy audits including energy audits that address cropland in addition to buildings and equipment.
- Innovative on-farm energy conservation technologies.
- Innovative on-farm applications of renewable energy production technologies to displace fossil fuel energy.
- Sustainable biomass production, harvest, and handling technologies.
- Evaluate and demonstrate the use of fast-growing woody biomass species in agroforestry systems e.g., alley cropping, riparian forest buffers, windbreaks, etc.

Productivity and Environmental Health of Pastureland or Rangeland

- Develop improved assessment tools for comparing "Pastureland Condition Scores" to a reference condition for particular soil and climatic conditions.
- Implement the use of new or novel pasture management systems that can benefit water or air quality, greenhouse gases (GHGs), or pathogen loading and runoff, and metrics to quantify measurable units of improvement gained through the use of these systems.
- Use of grazing management to reduce non-point source pollution impact of confined winter feeding of beef cattle.

Productivity and Environmental Health of Forestland

- Develop improved assessment tools for economic decision-making and modeling of the transitional stages of different forestry/agroforestry practices.
- Implement the use of new or novel forest/agroforestry management systems that can benefit water or air quality, greenhouse gases (GHGs), or other ecosystem services, and metrics to quantify measurable units of improvement gained through the use of these systems.
- Implement new technologies and/or approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance forest health including impacts from invasive species, pests, and fire.

Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture

- Examine methods and life cycle analysis for encouraging niche agricultural markets. These markets would focus on providing value-added agricultural products that are produced in an environmentally sustainable way.
- Develop and demonstrate the use of Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) in response to catastrophic events, e.g. emerald ash borer or thousand cankers disease.
- Develop and demonstrate the use of ESDs for the preservation of at risk forests, e.g. longleaf and shortleaf pine.

Soil Quality

- Compare new technologies and methods (carbon fractions, enzymes, and other) for early prediction of soil quality degradation.
- Demonstrate conservation technologies to reduce soil erosion and minimize soil emissions of carbon in organic soils.
- Demonstrate technologies to restore and enhance the function and ecosystem services of degraded soils.
- Demonstrate conservation technologies that help maintain soil quality on lands formerly enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that have been converted to crop production.

- Develop and implement a decision support system to aid land management decisions to enhance soil quality and other related ecosystem services.
- Evaluate and demonstrate technologies to restore and enhance ecosystem services of subaqueous soils.
- Application of continuous no-till crop production to enhance soil resources and other ecosystem services while maintaining crop productivity.
- Identify cover crop species and management strategies for areas with less than 20 inches of rainfall.
- Demonstrate agroforestry technology for enhancing soil health.

Priority Landscapes

- Adapt technologies [light detection and ranging (LiDAR), remote sensing, electromagnetic induction (EMI), and simulation models] for assessment of soil salinity and prediction of soils and landscape components subject to salinization.
- Develop and demonstrate innovative technologies to prevent, alleviate, and adapt to salinity in Great Plains landscapes (non-irrigated cropland management, irrigation water management, and crop species).
- Implement new and innovative technologies to restore and enhance at risk forest ecosystems, e.g., longleaf pine.
- Implement conservation practices and measure effects on ecosystem services at watershed landscape scales.
- Develop and demonstrate new technologies to support the preservation of cultural resources e.g., piloting GIS-based cultural resources tools.

Nutrient Management

- Demonstrate feed management, or adoption of new or novel feedstuffs or additives, for manure nutrient reduction to reduce water and air quality problems, GHGs, or pathogen loading and runoff.
- Demonstrate active methods which improve on the capture of nitrogen in manure management systems and provide the opportunity to recycle the manure nitrogen in lieu of synthetic fertilizers.
- Demonstrate the use of water filtration or other medium as a method of reducing chemical compounds and odors from poultry operations and other livestock facilities.
- Design and test “farmer-friendly” recordkeeping software for complex systems, including quantification of nutrients applied by crop and field, manure form, dates, irrigation data, and runoff water quality.
- Development of new strategies to fully implement existing nutrient management conservation.
- Demonstrate methods to capture dissolved phosphorus from field runoff and subsurface drainage.

Pest Management

- Evaluate the potential for conservation practices to reduce pesticide impacts on threatened and endangered salmonid species in the Pacific Northwest.
- Demonstrate how an appropriate suite of NRCS conservation practices including the NRCS integrated pest management (IPM), practice can be used to minimize the impacts of pesticides on salmonid species in the Pacific Northwest to support the goals of both the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and all applicable NRCS

conservation programs. Other conservation practices to consider include conservation crop rotation, cover crop, field border, filter strip, hedgerow planting, residue management, riparian forest buffer, vegetative barriers, windbreak/shelterbelt establishment, etc.

- Demonstrate how IPM techniques can be used to reduce ESA-listed salmonid species' exposure to pesticides. IPM techniques to consider include pesticide application only when monitoring indicates an economic pest threshold has been exceeded, careful application timing to reduce drift, soil incorporation of pesticides to reduce runoff, precision application with "Smart Sprayers" to reduce drift, partial pesticide substitution with cultural, mechanical, or biological controls or semiochemicals, etc.
- Demonstrate how a complete farm management system can help to protect ESA-listed salmonid species by reducing the overall need for pest control as well as mitigating risks from pesticide applications that are needed to sustain the agricultural production system.
- Demonstrate how environmental fate computer models such as the Agricultural Policy Environmental Extender (APEX) and the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) can be used to estimate site-specific impacts of mitigation techniques on in-stream concentrations of pesticides that may affect ESA-listed salmonid species.
- Demonstrate how monitoring data for pesticides that may affect ESA-listed salmonid species can be used to quantify the impacts of mitigation techniques and validate computer model simulations.
- Demonstrate how a standard set of information on land use, crops grown and management information could be developed for the critical habitat of an ESA-listed species to evaluate the pesticide use limitations that will be necessary to meet ESA in-stream water quality goals.
- Demonstrate how appropriate mitigation techniques can be practically described on enforceable pesticide labels.
- Demonstrate how to improve available information on threatened and endangered species and their associated habitat, how to meet ESA requirements, and how to apply conservation practices to help protect and conserve threatened and endangered species.

Air Quality and Atmospheric Resource

- Evaluation, demonstration, and documentation of air quality benefits/impacts of existing NRCS practice standards.
- Implement the use of new or novel technologies for removal of odors, dust, hair, feathers, and particulate from fan exhaust from confined animal operations, and document the results.
- Identification, evaluation, demonstration, and quantification of air quality improvement techniques, practices, and activities compatible with agriculture production and the management and handling of agriculture waste and by-products.
- Implement the use of water filtration or other medium as a method of reducing chemical compounds and odors from poultry operations or other livestock facilities, and document the method and results.
- Demonstrate reduced reactive nitrogen emissions from monoculture agriculture.

Program Outreach and Conservation Technology Transfer to Targeted Groups

- Improved or innovative conservation practices and systems for rice production that address the habitat needs of waterfowl, including metrics that assess potential habitat provided.
- Technology transfer to, but not limited to, Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Indian tribes, Land Grant Colleges and Universities, or Community-Based Organizations.
- Demonstration of new or novel technology that can easily and inexpensively be adopted by small-scale producers in order to address concerns or problems of the farmers, producers, or landowners.
- Demonstration of new or novel technologies that lead to significant management efficiencies in farm resource management from a systems perspective, including technologies that lead to demonstrated benefits to multiple ecosystem services.
- Examine resource conditions and land capabilities by social groups of the traditionally underserved groups and communities.
- Emphasis on program outreach to underserved producers or landowners.
- Opportunities to work with universities and other institutions to develop technical training for Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes or entities servicing Beginning, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers and Indian tribes.
- The transfer of demonstrated conservation technologies and practices through a producer handbook consistent with the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and adapted to specific producer groups (i.e., organic farming, specialty crops, livestock, poultry, row crops, small grains, agroforestry, etc.).

Sustainable and Organic Agriculture

Technology Needs

- Develop technology to determine which crops help to suppress specific pests and the sequencing of the crops to minimize pest (weeds, insects, diseases).
- Demonstrate technology to evaluate the predicted wind and water erosion for organic crop rotations and tillage systems and slopes greater than 1-2 percent slopes.
- Demonstrate technology to determine the proper crops and the sequence of the crops to maximize the nutrient cycling of crop nutrients.
- Determine the proper source, rate, timing, and method(s) of application for organically approved nutrient amendments.
- Determine harvesting times and techniques that may minimize pest damage for the planned commodity.
- Describe the ecological site description based on the existing condition and the expected site condition with organic management.
- Develop protocols to assess the suitability of forages for a given soil/climate under organic management conditions.
- Demonstrate technology to determine the amount (acres) of habitat required to provide adequate pest control, matching plant species to attract desirable beneficial insect species, and managing habitat to provide pest control during the cropping season.

- Demonstrate technology to determine how cover crops can be used on a continuous basis throughout the growing season to provide erosion control, crop nutrients, and pest control for the next crop in rotation and other ecosystem services.
- Adaption of technology and approaches to aid organic farming and organic transition.
- Adaption of technology and approaches to aid small scale farming.
- Demonstrate small-scale technologies in the harvesting and utilization of disease/insect killed timber and trees.
- Demonstrate methods and life cycle analysis for encouraging niche agricultural markets. These markets would focus on providing value-added agricultural products that are produced in an environmentally sustainable way, including agroforestry systems.

Field Data for Conservation Planning

- Identify and explain the various organically approved soil and crop amendments to address nutrients and pest management for organic operations.
- Produce an informational document for incorporating beneficial insect and pollinator habitat into the farm landscape to implement biological pest management strategies, including outcome metrics that describe expected habitat benefits.

Conservation Planning Needs

- Produce an informational document on developing NRCS conservation plans to help organic producers meet the Organic System Plan conservation components for crop and livestock production.
- Analyze requirements to develop a Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition Plan to identify obstacles and limitation that discourage its use by farmers and provide recommendation to overcome obstacles and limitations.
- Analyze requirements to become a Technical Service Provider (TSP) in order to write a Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition identifying obstacles and limitation that discourage individual from seeking TSP certification and provide recommendation to overcome obstacles and limitations.
- Expand the investigation of how conservation practices can be scaled to increase the adoption by small farms.
- Undertake an assessment of applicable conservation practices on organic production.

Conservation practice standard modification

- Evaluate the conservation practices that deal with establishing permanent vegetation (herbaceous and forest) to address approved seed and planting stock sources for organic operations.
- Evaluate conservation practices to ensure materials are addressed that will meet the National Organic Program (NOP) guidelines.
- Review NRCS conservation practice standards and activities to, (a) identify those current practices and activities that are most critical to sustainable and organic production systems, along with obstacles or limitations within the standard or activity guidance that prohibit or discourage use and provide recommendations to overcome these issues, and (b) propose practices or activities critical to sustainable and organic system conservation not currently available.

Specialty Crops

Technology Needs

- Demonstrate conservation systems for specialty crops using seasonal tunnels involving crop rotations, cover crops, conservation tillage, nutrient management, pest management, and irrigation systems.
- Develop and test new tools for measuring soil carbon where specialty crops are grown and on organic farms.
- Demonstrate technology to determine which crops help to suppress specific pests and the sequencing of the crops to minimize pests (weeds, insects, diseases) in specialty crop systems.
- Demonstrate conservation systems to include crop rotations, cover crops, organic mulches, conservation tillage, etc. in lieu of plastic culture.
- Determine the proper crops and the sequence of the crops to maximize the nutrient cycling in specialty crop production systems.
- Determine harvesting times and techniques that may minimize pest damage for the planned commodity.
- Demonstrate technology to determine the amount (acres) of habitat required to provide adequate pest control, matching plant species to attract desirable beneficial insect species, and managing habitat to provide pest during the cropping season.
- Demonstrate technology to determine how cover crops can be used for the production of specialty crops to include orchards and vineyards to provide erosion control, recycle crop nutrients, improve soil quality, pest control for the next crop in rotation, and other ecosystem services.
- Produce an informational document and evaluate criteria to determine when an Integrated Pest Management Plan has been developed and implemented that meets NRCS Pest Management Standard 595.
- Demonstrate technology on how agroforestry can be used for the production of specialty crops to provide erosion control, recycle crop nutrients, improve soil quality, improve pollinator habitat, and other ecosystem services.
- Identify conservation needs to support shellfish production and provide recommendations to address conservation needs.

Field Data for Conservation Planning

- Produce an informational document for incorporating beneficial insect and pollinator habitat into the farm landscape to implement biological pest management strategies.

Conservation Planning Needs

- Identify conservation needs to support specialty crop and provide recommendations to address conservation needs.

Conservation practice standard modification

- Identify conservation practices that are most critical to specialty crop production systems and produce an informational document to implement the practices.

Sage-Grouse

Technology Needs

- Demonstrate effectiveness, cost, and longevity of various types of fence markers to reduce or prevent grouse mortality due to fence collisions.
- Demonstrate cost, effectiveness, and durability of alternatives or modifications to wood fence corner posts that provide raptor perches.
- Demonstrate technologies to control the spatial positioning and social groupings of cattle without fences.
- Develop techniques and methods to accelerate big sagebrush establishment and growth on sagebrush ecological sites converted to introduced grasses.

Field Data

- Determine grouse habitat needs at the landscape level for each population.
- Determine grouse mortality impacts from various fence types.
- Determine safe distances from grouse seasonal habitat types to fences.
- Identify Ecological Sites associated with habitat needs at the landscape level.

Standard Modifications

- Develop and field test benefits to grouse and impact on livestock production from potential modifications to Practice Standards:
  - Fence – fence type, fence markers, and distance from seasonal habitats
  - Brush Management – develop treatment scenarios based on landscape parameters which limit treatment widths, lengths, and shape for the long-term maintenance of sagebrush and shinnery oak habitats and seasonal use patterns.

Planning Needs

- Develop Sagebrush and Shinnery Oak Management Guidelines to assist planning Brush Management in grouse habitat related to Ecological Sites.
- Develop guidelines for grouse friendly fences.
- Develop guidelines for grouse friendly water developments.
- Provide technology transfer to livestock producer groups and NRCS field office staff.
- Develop Geographic Information System planning and decision aids that assess sage-grouse habitats in relation to landscape stressors such as renewable energy development.
- Develop planning and decision aids to assess the value of habitat development projects by estimating sage-grouse population responses to conservation practices.
- Develop metrics of measurable habitat improvement that could potentially be traded under a species-banking framework.

Pollinator Habitat

Technology Needs

- Document the effectiveness and economy of alternate pest control methods in agricultural crops (e.g., ground application versus aerial application of pesticides, provision of habitat for “beneficial” insects) to protect pollinators and their habitats.
- Develop guidelines and management strategies for establishing and maintaining the foraging and nesting needs for specific pollinators and other beneficial insects.

- Develop guidelines and management strategies for the provision of quality foraging and "resting" areas for the European honey bee during or after their being transported to provide pollination services.
- Estimate and document the effects upon pollinator populations and health due to the conversion to biofuel feedstock or agricultural production of lands presently enrolled in CRP or other conservation easement programs.

Field Data for Conservation Planning

- Establish demonstration plantings of NRCS-recommended pollinator habitat seed/plant mixes to determine if these mixes are providing the expected pollinator habitat while also performing the intended conservation function.
- Document regional time of bloom of native plants and non-invasive, non-native plants in addition to monitoring the specific pollinators foraging upon these plants.
- Document the benefits to other wildlife species of improving pollinator habitat.
- Demonstrate effective methods of establishing and maintaining the most beneficial pollinator-friendly plant materials for specific regions of the Nation.
- Develop regional, crop-specific guidance specifying the vegetative species, landforms, and necessary acreage to support appropriate populations of managed and wild pollinators per unit area (e.g. acres) of pollinated crops (i.e., describe the components of the landscape).

Conservation Practice Standards Modifications

- Evaluate the following NRCS conservation practice standards using a large diversity of flowering plants in order to document if the revised practice standards do benefit pollinators while also meeting the main purpose of the conservation practice:
    - 332-Contour Buffer Strips
    - 342-Critical Area Planting
    - 393-Filter Strip
    - 412-Grassed Waterways
    - 528-Prescribed Grazing
    - 580-Streambank and Shoreline Protection

Conservation Planning Needs

- Develop region-specific "recipes" of pollinator-friendly plant species to fulfill specific pollinator needs in both natural and agricultural situations.
- Develop strategies to integrate pollinator habitat management into the agricultural working lands matrix to promote holistic, ecosystem-based conservation plans that support the full suite of ecosystem services.
- Develop region-specific and crop/orchard-specific plans that address the nesting and foraging needs of crop/orchard-specific pollinators.
- Develop region-specific and crop/orchard-specific metrics that define and establish measurable units of pollinator habitat that can be used to develop pollinator trading/banking programs.

2. Chesapeake Bay Watershed Category

Only pre-proposals that demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one bulleted topic specific to and within the Chesapeake Bay watershed will be considered. The Chesapeake Bay's watershed covers 64,299 square miles and includes the

District of Columbia and parts of six States: New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

CIG is accepting pre-proposals for projects that tackle specific deep-rooted agricultural problems that contribute significantly to degraded Chesapeake Bay water quality (e.g., manure/poultry litter nutrient excesses, legacy sediment, and the cumulative effect of small dairies). Solutions to these problems should be highly transferrable to other regions of the watershed, and results should be well-documented and communicated. Projects that address priority agricultural challenges could strive to reduce barriers to adoption of priority conservation practices and/or implement new tools or strategies to address the pollution source.

Natural Resources Management

- Projects that successfully maximize water quality benefits of livestock exclusion and strive to achieve 100 percent exclusion in one or more priority watersheds. Projects that implement exclusion practices that maximize water quality benefits and that address whole-farm nutrient balance issues are encouraged.
- Projects that demonstrate how to effectively reach small dairies that are not implementing even the most basic conservation practices. Projects that target technical assistance and outreach to small dairies in priority watersheds to implement whole farm strategies for achieving specific nutrient/sediment reduction targets are encouraged.
- Projects that tackle phosphorus-saturation in soils on poultry and dairy operations including finding ways to encourage farmers not to land apply manure on P-saturated soils, developing alternative uses of manure, and developing P-remediation approaches to draw-down phosphorus in soils.
- Projects that promote widespread use of nutrient-use efficiency tools that help improve the nutrient uptake by crops and reduce nutrient losses to the environment.
- Projects that show how to develop and employ outreach and marketing tools for farmers that demonstrate the on-farm economic benefits of conservation practices that bolster ecosystem services. Projects that apply these marketing tools to producers and deliver significant increases in nutrient/sediment-reducing conservation activities are encouraged.
- Projects that significantly reduce ammonia emissions from animal operations.
- Projects that promote widespread use of manure injection or other approaches to reduce phosphorus losses on no-till systems.
- Projects that demonstrate innovative Clean Water Act permitting for agricultural sources, and successfully deliver compliance assistance.
- Innovative processes for development of comprehensive nutrient management plans for small to medium animal feeding operations.
- On-farm utilization of manure from fields with high phosphorus to fields with lower phosphorus, as provided in comprehensive nutrient management plans.

Program Outreach

- Projects that target traditionally underserved communities using on farm small scale demonstrations, including: nutrient management, integrated pest management, wetlands restoration for improved water quality, comprehensive nutrient management plans, confined animal feeding operations, animal feeding operations.

- Innovative procedures to implement core conservation practices with farmers or producers with historically low participation in the Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs.
- Projects that show how to develop and implement program outreach marketing tools for farmers or producers that demonstrate the on-farm economic and environmental benefits of conservation practices. Projects that apply these marketing tools to producers and deliver significant increases in nutrient/sediment-reducing conservation activities are encouraged.

3. Mississippi River Basin

Only pre-proposals that demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one bulleted topic specific to and within the Mississippi River Basin and address the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) objectives to manage and optimize nutrient management, reduce downstream nutrient loads, maintain agricultural productivity, and enhance wildlife and other ecosystem services will be considered.

Primary Resource Concern: Water Quality (Nutrients - Nitrogen and Phosphorus)
Priority Efforts: Water Management, Vegetative Practices, and Nutrient Management
Area(s) of Consideration: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin within the Mississippi River Basin

Water Management

- Demonstrate treatment effectiveness and efficiency (cost per pound of reduction) of nitrogen contaminants in runoff or drainage water using innovative practices including: (1) bioreactors, (2) constructed wetlands, (3) drainage water management, and (4) saturated flow through tree/shrub buffers/riparian areas.
- Demonstrate innovative drainage water management for surface or sub-surface drainage systems improving acceptance and adoption by producers, documenting benefits to producers, increasing lands that drainage water management is suitable for, and incorporating drainage water management with other conservation practices for an effective system of nutrient and water management.
- Demonstrate effects of implementing drainage water management at watershed scale including management techniques to reduce annual and spring nitrate loads (cost per pound of reduction) to downstream receiving waters and assess effects on phosphorus.
- Demonstrate and evaluate bioreactors (size and types) to support development of conservation practice standards to address nitrogen removal in drainage tile lines.
- Demonstrate innovative field scale methods to monitor drainage water management system performance, including nitrate-nitrogen concentrations and flow rates, with an emphasis on simple and cost effective tests and measurements within the capability of producers.
- Demonstrate a systems approach to drainage water management that includes the use of buffer practices as part of the drainage system.

Wildlife Habitat Improvement

- Demonstrate new techniques and/or technologies for monitoring and evaluating wildlife habitat both on site and via remote sensing.

- Demonstrate collaboration among multiple landowners by implementing a systems approach to improve wildlife habitat.
- Demonstrate innovative concepts and practices to improve and manage wildlife habitat.
- Demonstrate how wildlife habitats can be evaluated as an indicator to water quality.
- Demonstrate innovative approaches to restoring and reconnecting bottomland hardwood ecosystems.
- Demonstrate nutrient reductions with the use of constructed, created, enhanced, or restored wetlands for the primary purpose of reducing nutrient loads and enhancing wildlife habitat.

Vegetative Practices

- Demonstrate and document nutrient reductions (cost per pound) with the use of constructed, created, enhanced, or restored wetlands for the primary purpose of reducing nutrient loads while enhancing wildlife and other ecosystem services.
- Evaluate variable width vegetated filters or targeted vegetative filters for areas where concentrated flow leaves a field. Demonstrate the use of harvestable vegetated filters to remove nutrients collected and utilized by vegetation.
- Demonstrate new alternatives for dedicated perennial crops which may be used for energy production or other purposes, targeting conversion from marginal pasture or croplands.
- Demonstrate innovative cover crop establishment and management techniques, including nutrient and manure management.
- Demonstrate an optimization approach to incorporate permanent vegetative practices to address critical nutrient management problems that fit within producer's productivity objectives and decisions at the field level.
- Demonstrate the efficacy of reconnecting subsurface drainage to interflow through herbaceous and riparian buffers, for enhanced denitrification of shallow ground water.
- Demonstrate how landscape-scale placement of perennial vegetation can bolster nutrient management and other ecosystem services.

Nutrient Management

- Utilize innovative approaches to improve the development, implementation, and documentation of nutrient management plans at critical sites including producer costs and benefits.
- Demonstrate new and innovative advances in precision farming technologies related to low disturbance fertilizer injection and document the effects on nutrient losses and producer risk.
- Demonstrate innovative cover crop establishment and management techniques, for the purpose of nutrient management.

Manure Management

- Develop and demonstrate innovative alternative systems for managing and handling liquid manure on farms with greater than 300 cows to reduce nutrient losses.

- Demonstrate innovative techniques for keeping liquid manure applied via irrigation, surface application, or injection from entering subsurface drainage systems through macro pores.
- Demonstrate new alternatives to traditional manure application to frozen ground and during periods of high soil moisture in order to effectively manage applications during the timeframe where the overwhelming amount of annual runoff occurs in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.
- Demonstrate improved farming systems that increase the time period available for land application of manure in order to reduce nutrient runoff and leaching.
- Demonstrate active methods for improving on the capture of nitrogen in manure management systems while providing the opportunity for recycling the manure nitrogen in lieu of applying synthetic fertilizers.
- Demonstrate innovative cover crop establishment and management techniques, for the purpose of nutrient management.

Adaptive Management

- Utilize innovative approaches to increase adoption rate of emerging nutrient management and load reduction practices such as cover crops, drainage water management, and bioreactors.
- Demonstrate innovative and efficient use of appropriate risk assessment technology tools (N-Index, P-Index, RUSLE2, WEPS, APEX (NTT), SWAT, NLEAP, etc.) to help producers apply conservation practices where most needed.
- Utilize innovative, participatory approaches to achieve MRBI objectives on the HUC 12 scale to promote and increase adoption of adaptive nutrient management.
- Develop simple, inexpensive, and reliable science-based tools or models to evaluate the effects of MRBI initiated systems and practices for managing nutrients at field and watershed scales and reporting outcomes.
- Demonstrate innovative field scale methods to monitor drainage water management system performance, including nitrate-nitrogen concentrations and flow rates, with an emphasis on simple and cost effective tests and measurements within the capability of producers.

Program Outreach

- Create a MRBI demonstration and program outreach site that includes a combination of avoiding, controlling, and trapping practices to manage nutrients and reduce nutrient loads. Establish on-farm water quality demonstrations, innovative pilot projects, and conduct producer outreach efforts with underserved communities to improve producer adoption of conservation practices/resource management systems and approaches to manage nutrients and reduce nutrient loadings while maintaining agricultural productivity.
- Develop and demonstrate use of, and provide needed support for, an effective communication network within MRBI for sharing successes, failures, innovative approaches, and monitoring efforts. Improve ability of NRCS and partners to adaptively manage MRBI to better manage/optimize nutrients, maintain agricultural productivity, and enhance wildlife.
- Demonstrate cooperative efforts to make high cost technology available to Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, Indian tribes, Land Grant Colleges and

Universities, and others needed for managing nutrients in MRBI watersheds that can be replicated and self-sustaining.

- Identify barriers on the adoption and implementation of core nutrient reduction practices (avoiding, controlling, and trapping) and demonstrate solutions and approaches to the barriers. Demonstrate methods to increase adoption of nutrient reduction practices with traditionally low or non participating producers in high risk areas.
- Demonstrate the use of ecosystems services and environmental trading to advance economic viability of agriculture conservation systems.

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

A. National Component

NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2011 will be approximately $25 million. NRCS will allocate this amount among the following funding categories: National, Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and Mississippi River Basin.

CIG will fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years. Funds will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process. The maximum award amount for any project will not exceed $1 million in FY 2011.

B. State Component

For FY 2011, State Components of CIG may be available as determined by each State Conservationist or Director. Funding availability and application submission information for State competitions will be announced through www.grants.gov and on the NRCS State web site separately from this notice. State Conservationists and Directors will determine the funding level for State competitions, with individual grants not to exceed $75,000.

The intent of the State Component is to provide flexibility to State Conservationists and Directors of the Caribbean and Pacific Islands Areas to target CIG funds to individual producers and smaller organizations that may possess promising innovations, but may not compete well on the larger scale of the national grants competition.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

CIG applicants must be a Federally recognized Indian tribe, State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization, or individual.

A. Matching Funds

Selected applicants may receive CIG grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. The recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and in-kind contributions. Of the applicant's required match (50%), a minimum of 25 percent of the total project cost must come from cash sources; the remaining 25 percent may come from in-kind contributions.

In-kind costs of equipment or project personnel cannot exceed 50 percent of the applicant's match (except in the case of projects carried out by either a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe or a community-based organization

comprised of or representing these entities). The remainder of the match must be provided in cash.

Matching funds must be secured at time of application. Applications should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Additional information about matching funds can be found at the following link: 2 CFR 215.

B. Beginning or Limited Farmers or Ranchers or Indian Tribes

For the FY 2011 grant award process, up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG may be set-aside for applications from Beginning Farmer or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, or Indian tribes or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. Up to three-fourths of the applicant's required matching funds (up to 37.5 percent of the total project cost) may derive from in-kind contributions. This exception is intended to help Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers, and Indian tribes meet the statutory requirements for receiving a CIG.

To compete for these set-aside funds, the applicant must make a declaration in the application as described in Part IV.A.2.b.(12) in this notice. Applications that are unsuccessful in the set-aside competition will automatically be placed in the general application pool for consideration. Funds not used in the set-aside pool will revert back into the general funding pool. Below are definitions of Beginning Farmer or Rancher and Limited Resource Producer. Definitions can also be found at: http://www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/

Beginning Farmer or Rancher - a person or legal entity who:

- Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of an entity who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch;
- In the case of a contract with an individual, individually, or with the immediate family, material and substantial participation requires that the individual provide substantial day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch consistent with the practices in the county or State where the farm is located; and
- In the case of a contract with an entity or joint operation, all members must materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch. Material and substantial participation requires that each of the members provide some amount of the management or labor and management necessary for day-to-day activities, such that if each of the members did not provide these inputs, operation of the farm or ranch would be seriously impaired.

Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher -

- A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than $155,200 in each of the previous 2 years (adjusted for inflation using Prices Paid by Farmer Index as compiled by National Agricultural Statistical Service); and
- Has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years (to be determined annually using Department of Commerce data).

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher - Farmers or ranchers who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as a member of a group without regards to their individual qualities. Those groups include African Americans,

American Indians or Alaska natives, Hispanics, Asians, and native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders.

C. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

Section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7, imposes a $300,000 limitation for all cost-share or incentive payments disbursed to individuals or entities under an EQIP contract between fiscal years 2008 and 2012. The limitation applies to CIG in the following manner:

- CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements. These grant agreements are not EQIP contracts; thus, CIG awards in and of themselves are not limited by the payment limitation.
- Direct or indirect payments made to an individual or entity using funds from a CIG award to carry out structural, vegetative, or management practices count toward each individual's or entity's EQIP payment limitation. Through project progress reports, CIG grantees are responsible for certifying that producers involved in CIG projects do not exceed the payment limitation. Further, all direct and indirect payments made to producers using CIG funds must be reported to the NRCS CIG program manager in the semi-annual report. Direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which the producer has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA programs (EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Security Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, etc.) since this would be considered a duplicate payment.

D. Project Eligibility

To be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements as set forth in 16 USC 3839aa-1. Further, all agricultural producers receiving direct or indirect payments through participation in a CIG project must also meet the EQIP eligibility requirements. Additional information regarding EQIP eligibility requirements can be found at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/. Participating producers are not required to have an EQIP contract.

A person or legal entity will not be eligible to receive any benefit during a crop, fiscal, or program year, as appropriate, if the average adjusted gross non-farm income of the person or legal entity exceeds $1,000,000, unless not less than 66.66 percent of the average adjusted gross income of the person or legal entity is average adjusted gross farm income.

A person who is determined ineligible for USDA program benefits under the Highly Erodible Land Compliance and Wetland Compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 will not be eligible to receive direct or indirect payments through CIG.

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area through EQIP are ineligible for CIG funding except where the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation. The burden falls on the applicant to sufficiently describe the innovative features of the proposed technology or approach (applicants should reference the appropriate State's EQIP Eligible Practices List by contacting the NRCS State office).

The grantee is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. NRCS will designate a Program Contact, Administrative Contact, and Technical Contact to provide oversight for each project receiving an award.

IV. APPLICATION and SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. PRE-PROPOSAL

1. How to Obtain Materials

The announcement for CIG funding opportunity can be found on the following web sites: www.grants.gov and http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html.

2. Content and Format

Applications must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for the full proposal phase. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. If submitting applications for more than one project, submit a separate application for each project. Material exceeding stated page limits will not be considered.

a. Pre-proposal Cover Sheet: (Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance) Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each project application. Standard Form 424 can be downloaded from Grants.gov-Forms.
b. Project Brief Description: (Three (3) page maximum in length) Applicants must submit a brief description including the information below. An optional template titled Fiscal Year 2011 CIG Pre-Proposal Template is available on the NRCS CIG web site at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html.
    1. Project title
    2. Funding category of the CIG application (refer to page 4)
    3. Primary priority area of the application (refer to page 4 for a list and description)
    4. Project start and end dates
    5. Project director name, and contact information (including email)
    6. Names and affiliations of project collaborators
    7. Project purpose
    8. Project area/location
    9. Project summary
    10. Project deliverables/products
    11. Declaration of EQIP eligible producer involvement
    12. Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe
c. Budget Information (One (1) page maximum in length).
d. DUNS Number: A Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. CIG applicants must obtain a DUNS Number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at: http://www.grants.gov/RequestaDUNS or by calling 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.
e. Central Contractor Registry (CCR) Registration: The CCR is a database that serves as the primary government repository for contractor information required for the conduct of business with the government. This database is also used as a central location for maintaining organizational information for organizations seeking and receiving grants from the government. CIG applicants must register with the CCR.

To register, go to: http://www.ccr.gov. Allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the CCR registration.

3. How to Submit an Application

Applicants may submit applications electronically through Grants.gov or to the e-mail address listed below. Applications submitted through Grants.gov or e-mail must contain all of the elements of a complete package and meet the requirements described above. Instructions for electronically submitting the required standard forms, and instructions for adding attachments are posted on Grants.gov. Applications submitted electronically are date and time stamped by Grants.gov and must be received by the identified closing date of **December 28, 2010**. E-mailed applications must be received by NRCS before the submission deadline.

Note: NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or web site problems related to Grants.gov or emailed submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process or send their email in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems.

E-mail address: NRCSFY2011CIG@wdc.usda.gov

The address for submitting hand-delivered, express mail or overnight courier service application is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Room 6227 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

The contact phone number for hand-delivered pre-proposals (needed to enter the USDA South Building) is: (202) 720-8071.

The address for applications sent via the United States Postal Service is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
Post Office Box 2890, Room 6227-S
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890

Applications submitted by fax will not be considered.

4. Due Date

Pre-proposals must be received in Room 6227 South Building at the NRCS National Headquarters by 4:00 p.m. EST on **December 28, 2010**. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

5. Acknowledgement of Submission

Applications received by the due date will be acknowledged with an electronic notification. Applicants who have not received an acknowledgement within 30 days of the submission must contact the NRCS program contact below. Failure to do so will

result in the application not being considered for the second phase of the application process.

CIG Program Contact:

Gregorio Cruz
National CIG Program Manager
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Room 6175 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250
Phone: (202) 720-8071
Fax: (202) 720-4839
Email: gregorio.cruz@wdc.usda.gov

6. Withdrawal

Applications may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before selections are made. Applications may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative thereof, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the application.

7. Review

Applications will be evaluated by NRCS staff under the bulleted topic identified by the applicant. Each application will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice including EQIP payment limitations. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

8. Anticipated Notification

Selected and not selected applicants will be notified via mail. Applicants selected for full proposals will be notified by **January 17, 2011**. Applicants will then be required to submit a full proposal package by **March 4, 2011**, which is described in the following sections.

V. **INFORMATION FOR FULL PROPOSALS** (only for those applicants notified at the end of the pre-proposal review process that their application has been identified for further evaluation).

A. FULL PROPOSAL

All Office of Management and Budget standard forms necessary for CIG submission are posted on the following web site: Grants.gov-Forms. An application checklist is available on the CIG Web site: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html.

1. Content and Format

Applications are required to contain the content, format, and information set forth below in order to receive consideration for funding. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applicants must submit one original copy of the application in the following format:

- Applications should be typewritten or printed on 8½" x 11" white paper. The text of the application should be in a font no smaller than 12-point, single-spaced, single-sided, with one-inch margins and page numbered.
- Applications that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding.

Applications must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

a. Proposal Cover Sheet: (Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance) Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each project application. Standard Form 424 can be downloaded from Grants.gov-Forms.

b. Project Description: The description must include the following information and is limited to 10 pages in length. Pages in excess of the 10-page limit will be discarded and not evaluated. Bibliography, resumes, and references will be included in the page count for the project page limit.

1. Project background: Describe the history of, and need for, the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a good probability for success of the project.
2. Project objectives: Be specific using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project's purpose and goals. Describe how the project is innovative.
3. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project.
4. Location and size of project or project area: Describe the location of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types and demographics, etc.) of the project area. Provide a map, if possible.
5. Producer participation: Estimate the number of producers involved in the project, and describe the extent of their involvement (all producers involved in the project must be eligible for EQIP).
6. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion.
7. Project management: Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant education or experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Explain the level of participation required in the project by government and non-government entities. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project.
8. Project deliverables/products: Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that will allow NRCS to monitor project progress and payment.

   In addition to specific deliverable, applications must include the following activities as deliverables:

   a. Semi-annual reports
   b. Supplemental narratives to explain and support payment requests
   c. Final report
   d. Performance items specific to the project that indicate progress [A thorough list and explanation of measurable performance items specific to

the project will be used in the technical evaluation (refer to "CIG Technical Evaluation Criteria")]

e. New technology and innovative approach fact sheet
f. Participation in at least one NRCS CIG Showcase or comparable NRCS event during the period of the grant

9. Benefits or results expected and transferability: Identify the results and benefits to be derived from the proposed project activities, and explain how the results will be measured. Identify project beneficiaries, i.e., agricultural producers by type, region, or sector; rural communities; and municipalities. Explain how these entities will benefit. In addition, describe how results will be communicated to others via outreach activities.
10. Project evaluation: Describe the methodology or procedures to be followed to evaluate the project, determine technical feasibility, and quantify the results of the project for the final report. Grant recipients will be required to provide a semi-annual progress report, quarterly financial reports, and a final project report to NRCS. Instructions for submitting quarterly reports will be detailed in the grant agreement.

c. Assessment of Environmental and Social Impacts: Describe and assess the anticipated environmental effects of the proposed project. The description of the potential environmental and social impacts must address all potential beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. A full description and assessment of the potential impacts to all environmental resources must be disclosed. One line or short descriptions of environmental impacts are not acceptable. The length of the analysis should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the environmental resources impacted either directly, indirectly (later in time), or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as number of acres of wetlands impacted, amount of carbon sequestration estimated, etc. Environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other specific resources protected by law, Executive Order, and agency policy. These resources are outlined in the NRCS Environmental Evaluation Worksheet, form NRCS-CPA-52, which is available at: NRCS-CPA-52. The CPA-52 form can be used as a guide for the scope of environmental information that should be prepared for this section of the application. In addition to describing impacts, applicants are required to assess the significance or degree of potential environmental impact of the proposed project on environmental resources. Applicants may consult with the NRCS Environmental Liaison concerning the scope of what should be addressed in this section of the application. A list of the Environmental Liaisons can be found on the following web site: Environmental Liaison

Note: Please be aware that applications for projects with potentially adverse impacts may need to be modified in order to achieve acceptable and beneficial levels of environmental impact. If projects cannot be modified, then there is a potential during the screening process that the application may not be selected.

d. Budget Information: Standard Form (SF) 424A Budget Information Non-Construction Programs) Applicants must prepare this document to identify budget needs. The SF-424A is available at: Grants.gov-Forms or can be obtained from a NRCS State office. For standard grant applications, a budget form is required for each year of requested support. In addition, a cumulative budget is required detailing

the requested total support for each year and for the overall project period. The budget form may be reproduced as needed by applicants. Funds may be requested under any of the categories listed on the form, provided that the item or service for which support is requested is allowable under the authorizing legislation, the applicable statutes, regulations, Federal cost principles, and NRCS program guidelines and can be justified, as necessary, for the successful conduct of the proposed project. Applicants must also include a budget narrative to justify their budget requests (see "e" below). If claiming indirect costs, the applicant must provide an indirect cost rate agreement or indirect cost rate proposal as justification for the rate of indirect costs being claimed. Indirect costs are based on total Federal funds awarded and cannot exceed 15 percent.

e. Budget Narrative (maximum 9 pages): In addition to the SF-424A, all applicants must provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project year. All budget categories for which support is requested must be individually listed (with costs) in the same order as the budget (SF-424A) and justified on a separate sheet of paper and placed immediately behind the Budget Form (SF-424A). Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. Explain how budget items such as personnel, travel, equipment, etc. are essential to achieving project objectives. List all position titles and salaries, description of fringe, travel, supplies, list equipment and cost and list other cost items. Justify the project cost effectiveness and include justification for personnel and consultant salaries such as resumes and description of duties. In addition to the information above, the subcontractors and consultants must also submit a statement of work. A budget narrative is also required for the matching portion.

f. Matching: Applications must include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third, non-federal parties.

Cash Match

For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement is required for each donation, signed by the authorized organizational representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor, (2) the name of the applicant organization, (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made, (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation, and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

In-Kind Match

"In-kind" refers to non-cash contributions of goods or services made by third party individuals or organizations to support projects. Examples of in-kind include work done by unpaid volunteers and donations of supplies, facilities, or equipment. In-kind contributions must be necessary to accomplish program activities and are verifiable.

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement is required for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representatives of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor, (2) the name of the applicant's organization, (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made, (4) a good

faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution, and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

The sources and amounts of all matching support from outside the applicant institution must be summarized on a separate page and placed in the application immediately following the summary of matching support (matching support means a budget narrative broken down by year).

The value of applicant contributions to the project will be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars, Cost Principles that apply to their entity for additional guidance, and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

g. Declaration of Previous CIG Projects Involvement: Identify any previously awarded CIG projects involvement related to this proposal and any of its principal investigators. Detail the purpose, outcomes to date, and how this new proposal relates to the previous award.

h. Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian Tribe: If an applicant wishes to compete in the 10 percent set-aside funding pool, applicants must make a declaration in writing of their status as a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities. This declaration is also required in order to be eligible for the in-kind contribution exception. (Refer to Part III B that describes the provision of a set-aside pool of funding for Beginning or Limited Farmers or Ranchers and Indian tribes.)

i. Declaration of EQIP Eligibility: Applicants must include a statement indicating that the proposed project will involve EQIP eligible producers. Applicants must make a declaration in writing that they, or parties involved in the project, are eligible for EQIP (if EQIP eligible producers are not involved, the proposal will be considered ineligible). The declaration must describe and certify the level of involvement by EQIP eligible producers.

j. State Conservationist Letter of Review: Applicants must send a letter showing that the application was sent to the appropriate State Conservationist(s) for review. If a project is multi-State in scope, all State Conservationists in the project area must be sent the application for review. Applicants must send their application (at least the Project Description, Budget Information, and Narrative) to the appropriate State Conservationist by 4:00 pm EST on **March 4, 2011**. A list of State office addresses and phone numbers is included at the end of this notice. Applicants are encouraged to consult with the appropriate State Conservationist(s) during application development to discuss the letter of review.

k. Certifications: (Standard Form (SF) 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs). All applications must include this document. The SF-424B may be found at: Grants.gov-Forms or by contacting the State office. Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following from 7 CFR:

a. Part 3017, Government wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement)
b. Part 3018, New Restrictions on Lobbying
c. Part 3021, Government wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)

2. How to Submit an Application

Applicants may submit applications electronically through Grants.gov or to the e-mail address listed below. Applications submitted through Grants.gov or e-mail must contain all of the elements of a complete package and meet the requirements described above. Instructions for electronically submitting the required standard forms, and instructions for adding attachments are posted on Grants.gov. Applications submitted electronically are date and time stamped by Grants.gov and must be received by the identified closing date of **March 4, 2011**. E-mailed applications must be received by NRCS before the submission deadline.

Note: NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or web site problems related to Grants.gov or emailed submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process or send their email in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems.

E-mail address: NRCSFY2011CIG@wdc.usda.gov

The address for submitting hand-delivered, express mail or overnight courier service applications is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Room 6227 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

The contact phone number for hand-delivered applications (needed to enter the USDA South Building) is: (202) 720-8071.

The address for applications sent via the United States Postal Service is:

Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Innovation Grants Program
Post Office Box 2890, Room 6227-S
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890

Note: Applicants must submit one signed original copy of each project application. Applications submitted by fax will not be considered.

3. Due Date

Applications must be received in Room 6227 South Building at the NRCS National Headquarters by 4:00 p.m. EST on **March 4, 2011**. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

4. Acknowledgement of Submission

Applications received by the due date will be acknowledged with an official letter. Applicants who have not received an acknowledgement within 30 days of the submission

must contact the NRCS program contact below. Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding.

CIG Program Contact:

Gregorio Cruz
National CIG Program Manager
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Room 6175 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250
Phone: (202) 720-8071
Fax: (202) 720-4839
Email: gregorio.cruz@wdc.usda.gov

5. Funding Restrictions

Awardees may not use unrecovered indirect costs as part of their matching funds.

CIG funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant;
c. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and any amendments thereto;
d. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
e. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
f. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and,
g. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the administrative contact person.

6. Patents and Inventions

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with USDA regulation 7 CFR §3019.36. This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with 7 CFR §3019.2, this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically.

7. Environmental Review Requirements

The Council on Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations at 40 CFR parts 1500-1508 and the NRCS regulation that implements NEPA

at 7 CFR part 650 require that an environmental review be prepared for actions where the agency has discretion and control. Accordingly, NRCS financial assistance under the CIG program requires compliance with these regulations. As part of the application packet, applicants are required to provide environmental information pertaining to their project to help NRCS determine the appropriate documentation required to comply with NEPA and NRCS regulations. If the application is selected for funding, the NRCS Program Contact and NRCS Environmental Liaison will coordinate with the selected applicant concerning documentation for compliance with NEPA. The selected applicant will be required to prepare and pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document (e.g., Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement if required for NEPA compliance). Grant funding cannot be approved until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met.

8. Withdrawal

Applications may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before selections are made. Applications may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative thereof, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the application.

VI. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process

There are three steps in evaluating CIG proposals. Proposals will be divided among technical peer review groups and then will be reviewed by a Technical Peer Review Panel. The Technical Peer Review Panel consists of NRCS national technical specialists, and technical specialists from other appropriately related Federal agencies, and non-Federal agencies. Applications will be reviewed based on the CIG Technical Evaluation Criteria listed in Part VI.B below.

The Technical Peer Review Panel will forward their recommendations and the proposals to a Grants Review Board, which will certify the peer review panels' recommendations and ensure that the application evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The CIG Grants Review Board consists of five members of NRCS leadership, specifically the Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, the Deputy Chief for Financial Assistance and Community Development, one Regional Conservationist, one State Conservationist and Office of Outreach and Advocacy. The Grants Review Board is chaired by the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology.

The Grants Review Board will forward recommendations to the NRCS Chief for final review and selection.

B. Criteria for Application Evaluation

Peer review panels will use the following criteria to evaluate project proposals:

Purpose, Approach, and Goals

- Design and implementation of project based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
- Promotes environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production.
- Project outcome is clearly measurable.

- Potential for successful completion.
- Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered and an acceptably significant level of improvement will be achieved.

Innovative Technology or Approach

- Project is innovative (national, regionally, and local in nature).
- Project conforms to description of innovative projects or activities in proposal request announcement.

Project Management

- Timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable.
- Project staff has technical expertise needed.
- Budget is adequately explained and justified.
- Experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of other organizations, institutions and agencies.

Transferability

- Potential for producers and landowners to use the innovative technology or technologies.
- Potential to transfer the approach or technology nationally or to a broader audience or other geographic or socio-economic areas, including limited resource, socially disadvantaged and other traditionally underserved producers and communities.
- Potential for NRCS to successfully use the innovative approach or methods.
- Project will result in the development of technical or related technology transfer materials (technical standards, technical notes, guide sheets, handbooks, software, etc.).

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

CIG awards are anticipated to be announced by **May 23, 2011**; all agreements are expected to be awarded by **August 12, 2011**. Funds are not awarded, and work may not start until an agreement is signed by both NRCS and the grantee.

VII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive a letter of official notification from National Headquarters. However, all selections are contingent upon successful completion of the environmental review process and financial review.

NRCS reserves the right to have grant award(s) administered by a third party. In the event that a third party administers the grant award(s), the applicant/recipient will be notified in writing.

B. Environmental Review Requirements

Upon notification of selection, the applicant must contact the NRCS Environmental Liaison concerning what documentation will need to be prepared for compliance with NEPA and NRCS regulations in order to determine the scope and level of NEPA documentation required for the project. The environmental documentation prepared to meet NEPA requirements must be prepared prior to award of grant funds.

Selected applicants may be required to prepare and pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document if an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is needed. Grant funds cannot be awarded until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met. A list of the NRCS Environmental Liaisons can be found at the following Web address: Environmental Liaison.

C. Grant Agreement

The Commodity Credit Corporation, through NRCS, will use a grant agreement with selected applicants to document participation in the CIG component of EQIP. The official notice will also indicate the need to work with the administrative contact to develop an agreement prior to starting work on the project. The grant agreement will include:

1. Project purpose
2. Project objectives
3. Project deliverables
4. Final project plan listing cooperators in the project and identifying the grant applicant and project manager
5. Project timelines and expected project completion date
6. Project progress and budget reporting requirements
7. Award amount and budget information
8. Information regarding requests for advance of funds or reimbursement
9. Role of NRCS technical oversight in the project
10. Reporting requirements including attendance at NRCS CIG showcase or comparable NRCS event during the period of the grant
11. Changes in project plans
12. Other requirements and terms deemed necessary by the CCC to protect the interests of the United States

VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

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Additional information about CIG, including fact sheets and frequently asked questions, is available on the CIG web page at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html.

Signed this _____ day of _____ in Washington, D.C.

Dave White
Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation and
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Attachments

IX. OTHER INFORMATION

Important: Applications Missing Any of These Required Items Will Not Be Considered

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS

FISCAL YEAR 2011 PRE-PROPOSAL PACKAGE CHECK LIST

☐ **1. Pre-proposal Cover Sheet:** Submit Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance

☐ **2. Project Brief Description:** Submit a brief description including the information below (Three (3) pages maximum in length). An optional template titled Fiscal Year 2011 CIG Pre-Proposal Template is available on the NRCS CIG Web site at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html.

a. Project title
b. Funding category of the CIG application (refer to page 4)
c. Primary priority area of the application (refer to page 4 for a list and description)
d. Project start and end dates
e. Project director name, and contact information (including e-mail)
f. Names and affiliations of project collaborators
g. Project purpose
h. Project area/location
i. Project summary
j. Project deliverables/products
k. Declaration of EQIP eligible producer involvement
l. Declaration of beginning or limited farmer or rancher or Indian tribe

☐ **4. Budget Information** (One (1) page maximum in length).

☐ **5. DUNS Number:** For information about how to obtain a DUNS number, go to http://www.grants.gov/RequestaDUNS or call 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.

☐ **6. Central Contractor Registry (CCR):** To register, visit http://www.ccr.gov. Allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the CCR registration.

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS

FISCAL YEAR 2011 FULL APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECK LIST

☐ **1. Proposal Cover Sheet:** Submit Standard Form 424 Application for Federal Assistance

☐ **2. Project Description:** (10 pages maximum, single-spaced, single-sided, 12 point font)

a. Project background
b. Project objectives
c. Project methods
d. Location and size of project area (include a map if possible)
e. Producer participation
f. Project action plan and timeline
g. Project management
h. Project deliverables/products
i. Benefits or results expected and transferability
j. Project evaluation

☐ **3. Assessment of Environmental and Social Impacts**

☐ **4. Budget Information:** Submit a completed Standard Form 424A (SF-424A) Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs.

☐ **5. Budget Narrative:** Submit a detailed budget narrative (maximum of 9 pages).

☐ **6. Matching Information.**

☐ **7. Declaration of Previous CIG Projects Involvement.**

☐ **8. Declaration of Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe (Special Provisions):** If applicable, include a statement declaring your status as a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Indian tribe, or community-based organization representing these entities.

☐ **9. Declaration Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Eligibility:** Include a statement indicating that the proposed project will involve EQIP-eligible producers. Applicants must make a declaration in writing that they, or parties involved in the project, are eligible for EQIP. (If EQIP eligible producers are not involved, the proposal will be considered ineligible.)

☐ **10. State Conservationist Letter of Review:** Include documentation showing that the proposal was sent to the State Conservationist(s).

☐ **11. Certifications:** Complete Standard Form 424B (SF-424B) Assurances-Non-Construction Programs.

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